

MEMORANDUM

To: Chairman Joe Balyeat and Members of the Senate Business, Labor and Economic Affairs Committee

From: Dennis Lopach, Lobbyist, Denturist Association of Montana

Date: January 18, 2010

Re: Senate Bill 101

Since your hearing on this bill last week, I have talked with a number of you and have continued to discuss the issues with many interest groups concerned with dental care in Montana. In an effort to better understand the opposition of the Montana Dental Association, I listened to the hearing on SB No. 2, which would allow dental hygienists to apply sealants to the teeth of school children without the presence of a dentist. The Dentists strongly opposed that bill, despite the fact that programs of this type are common in thirty-nine states.

I do not want to repeat the arguments you have already heard. Suffice it to say that the Denturists seek their own board in order to avoid the heavy-handed regulation of the Board of Dentistry, and will gladly pay the full cost of a new Board. While most new dentists have not studied dentures, the Denturists spend years of formal education and practical training focused on dentures. Statistics demonstrate that demand for dentures is growing. Dental implants, because of their cost, are simply not a solution that is affordable for many of your constituents.

Please consider this issue as a part of the national discussion of the cost of health care and the need for increased access to health services. I personally have a high respect for our dentists and the services they provide. I wish that all Montanans could receive the fine dental service that I enjoy. However, that is simply not a realistic possibility because of the shortage of dental services and the growing needs of low-income groups within our society.

The Denturists fully support the effort of the hygienists to address a clear need. While a complete examination and treatment by a dentist in his or her office might be preferable, the hygienists are offering a program that most states find acceptable.

Similarly, the Denturists seek the opportunity to pursue their profession under their own regulatory board. Unfortunately, with both SB 101 and SB 2, the dentists have demonstrated a desire to protect their own interests. The Montana public will be best served if alternatives are more readily available to them, and both SB 101 and SB 2 offer these alternatives.

The national debate about health care underscores the need for affordable and expanded alternatives. It is increasingly clear that alternatives such as physician assistants are urgently needed. The hygienists and Denturists are highly-trained alternative providers of dental services. If you allow them to be part of the solution, Montanans will be better served and will enjoy better oral health at less cost than the status quo that the Dentists appear so desperate to preserve.